

Most of us become aware of change gradually and in bits and pieces: it is rare when we have an opportunity to confront the whole picture. But that is exactly what we're trying to present in this exhibit, and it may amaze you to see how far we've travelled as a nation in the two hundred years since the Declaration of Independence was signed.

Consider the satellite view that opens this section of the exhibit. From a height of five hundred miles you are looking at seven of the original thirteen states. Two hundred years ago, nine hundred thousand people, or just under half the total population of the new nation, lived down there. Today the figure is thirty-one million people for the same area, or roughly one-seventh of a population of two hundred million.

If that satellite view had been taken in 1776, it would have shown a few small dots, barely identifiable as cities, encircled by a dark and menacing wilderness. Today an almost continuous city, known to planners as Boswash, stretches from Boston, two hundred miles out of the picture, to Norfolk, Virginia, at the bottom.

In two hundred years we have changed from a frontier society into a mass one. Once we went out to shoot our dinners and harvested corn planted among stumps in clearings newly hacked out of the forest. Now, we have grown accustomed to eating "homemade" food produced on the assembly line and sold at gigantic supermarkets. The log cabin, the colonial cottage, and the sod hut have been replaced by housing developments and suburban subdivisions; the one-room schoolhouse has grown into the multiversity.

In two hundred years, we have become the world's most mobile society. Over thirty-six million United States citizens change their addresses each year. Almost seven million move to a new state. Over eight and a half million go abroad. Vast amusement complexes process over twenty-one million fun seekers annually. And in 1969, three hundred thousand — as the picture on the opposite page reminds us — gathered for a single weekend of rock at Woodstock, New York. The automobile and the airplane, like the covered wagon and the steamboat in the last century, have established themselves as symbols of our restless way of life.

In two hundred years, we have become the most highly technological society the world has ever known. Technology has given us assembly lines, thousands of miles of interconnecting super-highway networks, organ transplants to prolong life, and radio telescopes to fathom the mysteries of the universe. In the process of making our lives richer and easier, it has permanently modified the physical environment.

But the machine is no longer the key to industrial power — more and more it is the integrated circuit and the transistor, or the control room where automated production is directed.

Technology has also given us something new, and something that did not exist in 1776: pollution of the air and the waters, the extinction of wild life and the destruction of our natural environment. But attitudes change. The environment, we are coming to recognize, is not something to be overcome, as we once tamed a savage wilderness, but to be lived with and enjoyed. A new spirit is also stirring in our cities. Decaying waterfronts and innercity slums are being rebuilt and made liveable again; car-clogged streets are being turned into pedestrian malls. Even before the fuel crisis, we were producing more bicycles than cars: almost sixteen million in 1973. We have been rediscovering the pleasures of sore thighs and the healing breezes of a spring day — or the thrill of hiking away from it all in a National Forest or Park.

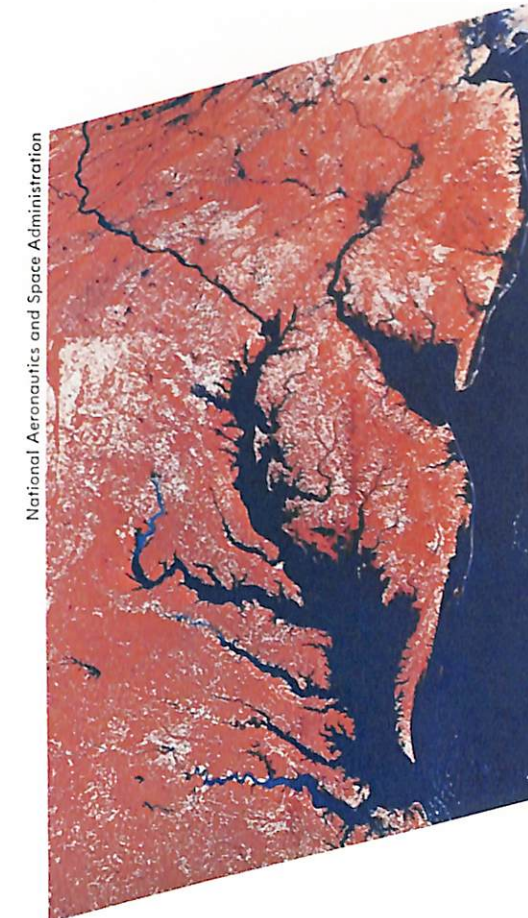
Technology is not being rolled back but redirected. It is creating new pioneers, like the Moon-walking Apollo astronauts who are exploring a new wilderness.

In the year of the Bicentennial, the sky is no longer the limit.

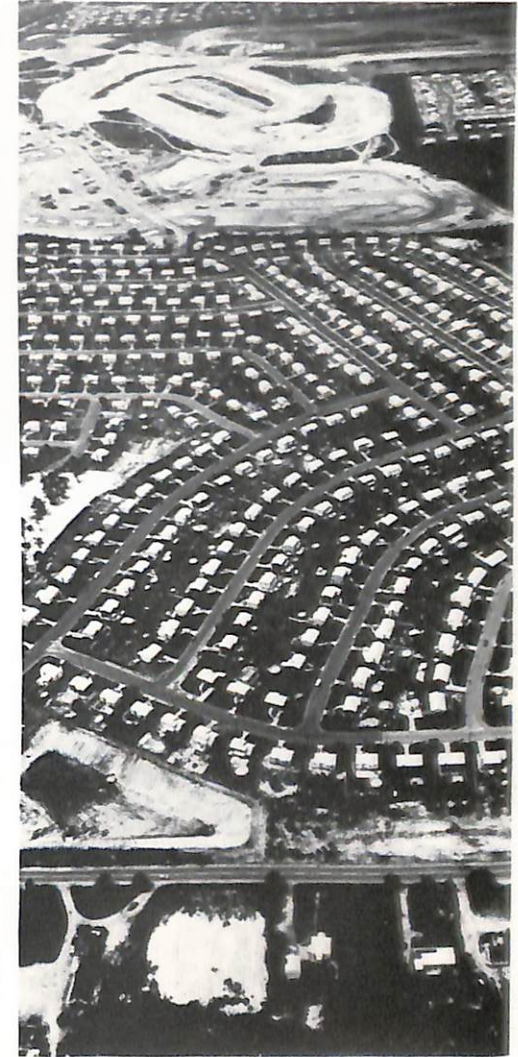
A The Eastern megalopolis, as photographed from a satellite 500 miles high.

B One weekend in the summer of 1969, 300,000 gathered to hear rock music at Woodstock, New York.

C An aerial view shows mass housing in Nassau County, New York.



A



C

E. Landy/Magnum Photos



B

Elliott Erwitt/Magnum Photos